

# Any Excuse for an Oyster Roast

By Joiquita Burka

There's a chill in the air and the laughter of old friends floats crystal clear through the azure sky. Everyone, from toddlers darting underfoot to the most experienced grill watchers, is gathered outside. It is a beautiful time in South Carolina and the perfect time for that old Lowcountry tradition of the oyster roast. Ecologically and traditionally, roasts are held in the winter months when the oysters are not spawning and the taste of these treasures is at its best.

Like every other tradition that is passed from generation to generation and family to family, there are many theories on how to roast river oysters to perfection. Most hold by the steaming

method. Steamers place the oysters on the grill and cover them with a wet burlap sack. The idea is to loosen the hinges on these creatures from the fertile South Carolina salt marshes and heat them through. Once that is done, it's time to eat.

The best tools are a heavy-blade knife and a pair of cotton gloves. Don the glove to protect against the hot oyster, slide the knife between the shells and enjoy. Some douse them with hot sauce or lemon juice, some slide them onto saltines and others just enjoy them straight from the shell. The point is to laugh, swap tales, celebrate friends and family, and escape, for just a few moments into a tradition as old as the tidelands.

